

# THE epicenter

Employee Newsletter of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System • Edition 2, 2008

## VAPAHCS Holds First Annual Traumatic Brain Injury Resource Fair

The VA Palo Alto Health Care System in conjunction with VISN 21's Polytrauma Network Site and the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center held a first annual Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Resource Fair on Saturday, March 22, 2008 in celebration of TBI Awareness Month.

The VAPAHCS auditorium transformed into a colorful and lively gathering of patients, families, and community based organizations, military personnel and VA personnel. More than 100 participants and 23 community organizations attended, offering information and materials for participants.

The impetus for the event was to raise public and VAPAHCS awareness to TBI, referred to as the "signature injury" of the Global War on Terror. What is a brain injury? The CDC defines a traumatic brain injury as an injury to the head arising from blunt or penetrating trauma or from acceleration-deceleration forces. An injury can range from mild, with brief changes in mental status to severe, a longer period of unconsciousness and/or amnesia after the injury. Regardless of severity, the consequences are often devastating. Each year an estimated 1.4 million individuals in the United States sustain a TBI.

The signs and symptoms of a TBI can be subtle. Symptoms of a TBI may not appear until days or weeks following the injury. Others may overlook symptoms when they look "fine," even though they may act or feel differently. Some descriptions of brain injury include:

- "I cracked my noggin."
- "I had a concussion."
- "I blacked out."
- "I had my brains rattled."

TBI touches the lives of many civilians as well. There are many ways to reduce the risk of a TBI. A few examples include:

- Wear a seat belt/use a child safety seat for children every time you drive or ride in a motor vehicle.



*LTC David Rabb, Military Liaison, speaks with VAPAHCS Human Resources Management staff.*

- Wear a well-fitted and maintained helmet when engaged in certain sports and activities such as, riding a bike or motorcycle; during contact sports, such as football or boxing; using in-line skates or riding a skateboard; batting and running bases in baseball/softball or riding a horse; or skiing, sledding, or snowboarding.

It is important to remember in sports, do not return to the activity with a known or suspected TBI or concussion until receiving an evaluation and clearance by an appropriate health care professional to return to the sport or activity.

VAPAHCS will host the second annual TBI Resource Fair in March 2009. If you would like to participate in planning for this event, please contact Julianna Brooks at [julianna.brooks@va.gov](mailto:julianna.brooks@va.gov).

For more information on the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, please visit [www.dvbic.org](http://www.dvbic.org).

### Inside this issue ...

A Word from our Director .....	2
Occupational Therapists Help Patients Master the Skills for the "Job of Living" .....	3
VAPA Arts' First Annual Arts Awards Night .....	4
Making Local Innovations National .....	4
Dr. Roy Soetikno's Research Study Published Worldwide .....	5
CHSA Presents Distinguished Consumer Award .....	6

The VAPAHCS SEP Committee Wants You! .....	6
Creative Arts Celebrated at Menlo Park .....	7
On the "Wii" to Recovery .....	7
VA Adds \$5 Million to Budget to Train More Psychologists .....	8
2007 ELDP Graduates .....	8
Employee News .....	9
You Make a Difference! .....	10

# A Word From Our Director



**Elizabeth Joyce Freeman, Director  
VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

As we enter the third quarter of this fiscal year, we are experiencing a number of major changes in leadership at VAPAHCS. We said good-bye and good luck to two of our most prominent and long tenured leaders in Nursing, Alice Naqvi, our Nurse Executive, and Dwight Wilson, our Chief Nurse for Extended Care. Alice and Dwight have a combined tenure of approximately 65 years of service at VAPAHCS. Careers of this longevity, in difficult leadership positions, are rare. Alice and Dwight both showed

enormous commitment to VAPAHCS throughout their careers. They witnessed vast changes in the methods of delivery of care, especially during the past 10 years. They planned the activation of new facilities in Menlo Park and Palo Alto. They led through the advent of the VISN structure and the introduction of performance measures.

We recognize Alice for her visionary leadership of a complex “state of the art” Nursing Service. She created a stimulating culture of creativity throughout her tenure and demonstrated exemplary organizational stewardship and stellar interdisciplinary collaboration with all services. As a hands-on clinical leader, she energized staff to achieve Best Practices in Nursing and established stretch goals for Nursing Service. Through her efforts and philosophy, nursing staff knew they made a difference in patient care. They also knew the value of their contributions.

Dwight’s 31 years of federal service highlight his dedication to the quality of care for the extended care patient population. His progressive executive leadership created an enriched culture and genuine commitment to the stellar Extended Care Programs at VAPAHCS. He demonstrated innovation throughout his VA career, especially in the development of dynamic, cutting-edge programs such as Hospice and Respite. Through Dwight’s leadership and direction, the VISN-21 wide Extended Care Product Line is exemplary.

We will conduct extensive national searches for both the Nurse Executive and Chief Nurse, Extended Care positions. Ms. Sandra Parkes graciously agreed to serve as Acting Nurse Executive and Ms. Myrna Musni agreed to serve as Acting Chief Nurse, Extended Care.

While we will fill these critical vacancies as quickly as possible, we will never replace the decades of dedication from Alice and Dwight.

We recently also said goodbye to Dr. Geller who celebrated his retirement from VA service at the end of April after a long and successful career as a physician, anesthesiologist and intensivist. He was recruited to the VAPAHCS in 1993 to be the Director of what was then the Surgical ICU and became the Director of the Medical/Surgical ICU at its formation in 1997, a position he has held since that time.

During his tenure at the VAPAHCS, he gained a reputation as a skilled and caring physician with progressive ideas about both clinical care and the role of technology in the care of critically ill patients. Under his guidance, the patients passing through the MSICU at the VAPAHCS have received the most up to date care available. He has been instrumental in introducing electronic medical records into both the MSICU and the OR, and has been a key player in spreading the word of the value of these systems throughout the VA nationwide. We wish him all the best in his retirement and are grateful to him for continuing to serve as a consultant to VAPAHCS.

We also said good-bye to Dr. Robert “Tim” Verceles who resigned recently to enter private dental practice. Among his many achievements, he received the Mastership Award by the Academy of General Dentistry. This award demonstrates a long-term commitment to provide patients with the most current dental treatment options and superior patient care. In addition, he attended the “VAPAHCS Emerging Leader Development Program” and the “New Dental Service Chief Training.” He also participated in the “VISN 21/22 Leadership Development Institute.” His considerable dedication to veterans was seen by his outreach efforts to provide mobile dental services to homeless veterans in the Santa Clara community. We congratulate him in his new career path and wish him all the best in his new practice.

Unfortunately, as most of you know, VAPAHCS and VISN 21 suffered another huge loss this spring. Dr. Robert Wiebe, our VISN 21 Director since 1997, is leaving VA to serve as the Chief Medical Officer for Catholic Healthcare West. VISN 21 has been a top performing VISN throughout his dedicated service. His contributions to VA, VHA, VISN 21 and VAPAHCS throughout his 22 years of VA service are far too numerous to list. I am extremely grateful for the privilege of working with and learning so much from Dr. Wiebe. I am even more fortunate to have benefited from his mentoring and from witnessing his exemplification of the true servant leader. Thank you Bob, for everything you have done in service for our veterans.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth J. Freeman". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Elizabeth Joyce Freeman  
Director**

# Occupational Therapists Help Patients Master the Skills for the “Job of Living”

## April was Occupational Therapy Month.

The American Occupational Therapy Association defines occupational therapy as the “ordinary and familiar things that people do every day” and includes work, self-care, play, and leisure. Occupational therapy is skilled treatment that helps people become successful in their everyday occupations such as bathing, dressing, grooming, money management, community mobility, meal preparation, and other activities that are basic to our daily lives.

Occupational therapists (OTs) have been working to rehabilitate veterans since World War I and work in diverse areas including spinal cord injury, neuro-rehabilitation (e.g., stroke, brain injury), polytrauma, hand therapy, hospice, home care (e.g., home safety evaluation), acute care, long-term care, psychiatry, outpatient, research, computer assistive technology, driver rehabilitation, and employee workstation ergonomics. These therapists strive to help veterans master the “skills for the job of living.”



*Occupational Therapist instructs a veteran on the safe use of a scooter to maximize his ability to engage in meaningful activities.*

them achieve independence in doing the things in life that are important to them.”

According to Hess, part of an OT’s value lies in the client centered focus on what the patient wants or needs to do in life. When someone is unable to do the things they need/want to do, the therapist evaluates and determines what may be preventing the patient from being successful in these activities. It could be cognitive, physical disability, or something in the environment, preventing that person from achieving their goals.

## Veterans can access OT services

Home safety evaluations can be provided by OTs and may include recommendations for equipment (e.g., wheelchair, bedside commode, shower chair, grab bars, etc), tips for preventing accidents and falls, recommendations for home modifications to improve safety, security, and independence.

Occupational therapist Louise Hess says, “I like the holistic approach of occupational therapy; we blend the person with the environment to help



*Acute Care Occupational Therapist provides early intervention for post-operative veteran in the ICU setting.*

“We work with the person to become independent in daily activities,” said Hess, “It may involve working with an individual to learn alternate methods of performing tasks to accommodate an injury or illness.” It may also involve adapting the environment to the patient’s needs (e.g., a ramp to access their home, handles to help them get out of bed or bars to increase safety with getting in/out of the bathtub, removing obstacles that can create a fall risk), Hess added.

“For me, one of the best rewards of working in occupational therapy is when patients and family come back and tell me how happy they are to be able to live in their homes with their loved ones and with the quality of life they desire due to the help I’ve been lucky enough to provide,” said Hess.

For more information about occupational therapy, please visit the America Occupational Therapy Association website at [www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org) or speak to a VAPAHCS occupational therapist.



*Veterans in the Spinal Cord Injury unit learn how to use adaptive methods or devices for safety and independence in everyday tasks.*



# VAPA Arts' First Annual Arts Awards Night

The first annual **VAPA Arts Awards Night** on Feb 1, 2008 turned out to be a huge success. The VAPA Arts group performs several times a year, supporting events such as the Stand Down, Recreation Therapy Arts and Craft Festival, Veterans Serving Veterans, Federal Women's Program, and a once a month lunch time performances in the "House of Blues," (PAD Cafeteria).

While planning their end of the year concert, the committee thought about presenting some recognition to their many



performing artists. So, the VAPA Arts committee decided on a year-end concert in conjunction with an awards ceremony – similar to a Grammy Awards night. They provided six performances along with six categories for awards. They also had a guest speaker, banquet, slides show and plenty of camaraderie.

The VAPA Chairperson, Jeff Perez (Human Resources Management Service), originally started VAPA Arts. After playing for events throughout the VAPAHCS since November 2006, Jeff realized the demand for the performing arts was high, and he needed help playing and organizing the performances. He placed ads around campus and in VISTA and many artists came forward. The Director approved the committee in July 1, 2007. The group currently has 18 performing artists from all types of services like Engineering, HR, Nuclear Medicine, Research, Chaplain Service, Canteen Service and many others.

The VAPA Arts is a wonderful program that provides a great service to our Veteran community. The musicians are talented and their performances are very professional and well planned. VAPAHCS is very fortunate to have a talented group of musicians and staff providing such a quality service, which enhances morale of patients and staff alike.

## Making Local Innovations National

VHA clinicians have long benefited from locally developed applications, termed Class III software. In fact, the credit to VistA's great success often goes to doctors and other healthcare professionals working closely with IT professionals. However, variations in VistA installations from medical center to medical center often make it difficult for others to adopt useful innovations. VHA is putting in place processes that will support the continued development of Class III products and make sure existing Class III high-value solutions are brought forward.

There are both immediate actions and long-term plans to position Class III candidates for national release. Existing Class III products are being identified, reviewed, and assessed in large numbers for possible release. At the same time, test accounts are providing developers a platform to collaborate on ideas for development of Class III products.

VHA is planning for long-term Class III development with the Innovation Sandbox. When it becomes operational, the Innovation Sandbox will open a virtual environment for developers across the VHA to work on solutions to common problems and deliver those solutions in compliance with VA development standards.

Three Class III products are currently in the pilot phase, eight are under technical readiness review prior to release, and a third set has just undergone review by the Informatics & Data Management Committee (IDMC).

The first round of three pilot projects includes:

- \* CAIRO Shift-Change Handoff Tool for Physicians - Developed in Indianapolis, the purpose of this application is to reduce the variability in physician-to-physician communication at patient handoff, and to increase readability. Scheduled to release to test sites in early March 2008.
- \* Surgery Case Manager - Developed in Portland, this application allows tracking of surgeries, including medical and surgical pre-op evaluations, wait times for evaluations and surgeries, cancellations and other delays. The project national release of the application is late May 2008.
- \* Medication Reconciliation - Developed in Hines, this application facilitates the development of a complete list of medications for the patient at discharge. It has been operational at Hines as Class I, since January 29, 2008.

Eight software candidates in the second round are currently under technical review to determine their readiness for release as Class I products. This review will ensure that software is compliant with standards, such as 508, privacy and security; has adequate documentation to maintain the software; development standards were met; appropriate quality controls were exercised; and complete planning for ongoing maintenance.

To date, local solutions released at the national level have yielded excellent results, due largely to the coordination of VHA leadership and committed developers who have been willing to participate in review processes and necessary revisions. This partnership with local developers makes VA innovation work.

# Dr. Roy Soetikno's Research Study Published Worldwide

Across the country, doctors are paying very close attention to groundbreaking colonoscopy research conducted at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System.

Chief of Gastroenterology Dr. Roy Soetikno's research study on colon cancer published in March in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* created an incredible amount of press for VA Palo Alto Health Care System. To date, the story has run on NBC Nightly News, ABC World



*Dr. Roy Soetikno's VA Palo Alto team collaborated with Japanese gastroenterologists to develop expertise in detecting flat or depressed [potentially cancerous] lesions in the colon. Doctors recommend routine examinations; early detection is key to cancer prevention and treatment.*

News Tonight, ABC 33/40, CBS Evening and Morning News, Wall Street Journal, and many local affiliate channels across the country. Additionally, print stories ran in USA Today, page 1 of the New York Times, Associated Press, Readers Digest, Bloomberg Press, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle, San Jose Mercury News, Chicago Tribune, Washington Post, Science News, MedNews, to name a few.

The research, which included 1,819 VA Palo Alto veterans with an average age of 64, suggests that flattish abnormal growths known as nonpolypoid colorectal neoplasms (NP-CRNs) in the colon are more common than previously thought. NP-CRNs were considered until recently to be rare in the U.S. and often missed during colonoscopies because they are harder to see and similar

more carefully, more slowly, and by the book.

"They look like a pancake just lying on the floor," said Soetikno. The physician-researchers studied colonoscopy videos showing flattish or depressed growths and learned how to spray a bluish dye inside the colon to highlight their subtly abnormal texture. The Palo Alto VA began using this specialized method in 2000, and Soetikno and his colleagues expect they will now become more widespread in VA and in other medical centers.

Colon cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer death in the United States, after lung cancer, with about 154,000 new cases detected and 52,000 deaths a year. It is one of the few cancers that is totally preventable if precancerous growths are found and removed; it can also be cured with surgery alone if found early enough.

in color to healthy tissue. Moreover, they are nearly 10 times more likely to be cancerous than polyps, which are currently the main target for detection and removal during colonoscopies.

The study found that nearly one in 10 colonoscopy patients had flat, non-polyp lesions, and that these lesions were 10 times as likely to contain cancerous cells as the traditional polyps. Dr. Soetikno believes his research will force many doctors to perform colonoscopies

Several staff and volunteers participated in a Wheelchair Wash at VA Palo Alto on Sunday, February 24, 2008. The focus areas of this event were fourth floor of the hospital, Hospice, and Sub Acute units. The volunteers received special training in this task to ensure they performed the task in a professionally supervised manner, while meeting the health and sanitation standards of the hospital. This event is vital to the reduction of the spread of germs and infection to the patients, as well to the public.

For more information about future Wheelchair Wash volunteer events, please contact Michael E. Armijo, VAPAHCS volunteer at 650-518-1476.



# CHSA Presents Distinguished Consumer Award

The California Speech-Language and Hearing Association (CHSA) recently presented patients' Jason Poole and Angel Gomez the Distinguished Consumer Award. In determining a winner for this award, CHSA was looking for people who have received speech pathology treatment and have shown great progress, perseverance, and helped to promote our profession (speech pathology) to the public.



According to Cari Nicholson, VAPAHCS Speech Pathologist, the department felt that Angel and Jason exceeded in those areas. Angel and Jason participated in speech therapy for several years making outstanding progress in many areas, including reading, writing, verbal expression, and comprehension.

"They are also very motivated to continue to improve and supportive of each other as well as other VAPAHCS patients," Nicholson stated.

Angel and Jason were featured in many news publications and TV news segments; thus exposing the public to some of the effects of Traumatic Brain Injury and the extensive rehabilitation process.

"Our department nominated these patients for this award," said Nicholson. "Letters of recognition were submitted from the speech pathology department, their Polytrauma Transition Rehabilitation Program case manager, as well as a collective letter from the other patients in the PTRP, and samples news stories they have been featured in," she said.

We are very proud of Jason, Angel, and all their success.

## *The VAPAHCS SEP Committee Wants You!*

If you share an appreciation for the diversity, which makes our country so great and would like to be a part of Special Emphasis Programs (SEP) that celebrates cultural awareness, then SEP "wants you!"

Each special emphasis group has a program manager and works directly with the EEO program manager, assistant, and the EEO Advisory Board. Their roles are to plan and implement an event, training, and/or observance for employees to celebrate culture, improve cross-cultural effectiveness, and/or present ideas to better an all-inclusive working environment.

Committee membership is open to all employees, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, parental status or disability. Applicants must obtain supervisory approval to be eligible for participation. The SEPs are actively recruiting members for all committees, the time commitment is minimal, but the impact is significant!

We welcome your ideas for increasing cultural awareness and for supporting a diverse and inclusive working environment. Your contributions can truly make a difference.

The VAPAHCS EEO program sponsors six, Special Emphasis Program (SEP) committees:

- African-American - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday & Black History Month (January & February), SEP Manager, James Mason
- Asian-Pacific Islander - National API Heritage Month (May), SEP Manager, Kim Monlux
- Federal Women's Program - Women's History Month & Women's Equality Day (March & August), SEP Manager, Carly Cortese
- Hispanic - National Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15), SEP Manager, John Aboytes
- Native American - National Native American Month (November), SEP Manager, Brian Higgins
- People with Disabilities - National Disability Awareness Month (October), SEP Manager, Brenda Piggue

Please contact the program manager if you are interested in joining a dynamic, energizing group, which plan meaningful events that celebrate our diversity and rich culture. For additional information, please contact Tracy Marino, EEO Program Staff Assistant, at extension 62116, or Beth Stovall, EEO Program Manager, at extension 65113.



# Creative Arts Celebrated at Menlo Park

The 22nd annual National Veterans Creative Arts local competition was held at the Menlo Park division on March 19, 2008. The event welcomed the artistic talents in Music, Art, and Creative Writing from 73 artists in the VAPAHCS community.

Three community volunteers with expertise in several artistic media judged outpatients, inpatients, and staff entries. Approximately 450 patients, guests, volunteers, and staff attended the gallery event. VAPAHCS Medical Media staff introduced an additional level of creativity by tirelessly recording the event in their own expert medium of photography. All the first place patient entries were digitalized, transcribed, cataloged, and made ready for the April deadline to send on to the national judges for the competition to resume with entries from all VA stations nationwide.

In preparation for the gallery day, a Creative Arts Workshop was held in February. The focus of this workshop was to promote creative expression and spark the interest of Veterans to submit art entries to the local art exhibition and competition. Throughout



the daylong workshop, participants discovered new art media, and explored their creativity.

Staff, volunteers and veterans lead a variety of workshops, which included creative writing, acrylic paint, watercolors, mixed media, drawing, macramé, leather craft and fly lure tying.

There is clear documentation that in many settings the clinical fast track is along the right hemisphere, the creative side, of the brain. The arts in therapy present a pure and safe vehicle for exploring, changing, and celebrating new confidence through transcending and transforming personal barriers. This event is a perfect milieu to facilitate that process among the many and the diverse.

Recreation Therapy Service, Voluntary Service and the Chaplain Service, sponsored and supported the event. The American Legion Auxiliary and Help Hospitalized Veterans sponsor the national event.

The VAPAHCS is proud of our entrants and express our gratitude in helping all to acknowledge the extraordinary talent that we share.

## On the “Wii” to Recovery

The Nintendo Wii Game System is quickly gaining popularity across the country as an effective tool for recreation therapists working in the healthcare field.

Recreation therapists here at VAPAHCS are utilizing the Nintendo Wii System as a way to improve functional skills, build self-confidence and encourage teamwork among patients. The Wii can be utilized during therapy with a wide range of patients, including those in long term care, mental health, day respite, spinal cord injury and polytrauma rehabilitation programs. It is especially popular with the younger veterans who have played video games in the past for recreation.

The Wii system differs from other game systems because it uses special motion-sensing wireless controls, allowing the players to engage in realistic motions which translate into game moves. For example, during the golf game, the player must physically bring his arm back and follow through with the swing while the player on the screen follows his motion.

With the “Wii Sports” game, players are able to participate in tennis, bowling, baseball and other sports which encourage the restoration and development of motor skills, range of motion, hand-eye coordination, visual skills, strength and endurance. One polytrauma patient reported that playing the Wii Sports game helped improve his visual scanning, balance and coordination.

Other games, such as “Big Brain Academy,” focus on improving cognitive abilities, such as memory and attention skills, identification of objects, decision making, problem solving and math skills.

Players can even track their performance over time so they are able to see improved results with practice, contributing to increased self-esteem and motivation.



*Recreation Therapist Rebecca Tynn cheers on Polytrauma patient while working with the Wii system.*

Groups of patients can also form their own team and compete with other players across the country through the Wii network. This type of game networking encourages socialization, healthy competition and camaraderie among the veterans. Patients in the day respite program have also demonstrated increased group interaction and camaraderie while cheering each other on during the bowling game.

The Recreation Therapy Service at VAPACHS looks forward to expanding their use of the Wii technology in recreation therapy as more games and equipment become available.

---

# VA Adds \$5 Million to Budget to Train More Psychologists

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is adding \$5.3 million a year to its budget to expand training programs for psychologists to provide more mental health services for veterans returning from recent combat.

To meet increased needs for mental health services, including those of veterans returning from the Global War on terror, VA has added mental health programs in primary care, polytrauma, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental health specialty areas.

VA has hired more than 800 psychologists in the last three years to meet these needs. Because psychology is a key discipline in comprehensive health care, VA anticipates an ongoing need to employ additional psychologists to meet new and ongoing needs of veterans.

“VA is taking action to provide more mental health services for our nation’s veterans, especially for those who have recently returned from combat,” said VA Secretary James B. Peake. “By expanding our budget and training programs for psychologists within VA, we will be able to make enhancements to the world-class mental health services we already provide. Not only will this initiative meet our short- term hiring needs, but it will also guarantee that VA has a pool of well-trained psychologists in the future.”

The best resource for VA recruitment of psychologists has been VA’s own training programs, as 73 percent of psychologists hired in the past two years have had VA training.

As a result, VA’s Offices of Academic Affiliations and Mental Health Services have partnered to increase the number of psychologists receiving training through VA programs each year, beginning with the 2008-2009 training year.

The new positions will include 61 internship and 98 postdoctoral fellowship positions, bringing the number of psychology training positions nationwide to 620 per year.

The recently awarded positions include four new internship training programs and 26 new postdoctoral fellowship programs. In addition, 31 existing internship programs and 17 existing postdoctoral fellowship programs have been expanded.

The new internship programs are at the following locations: Anchorage, AL; Asheville, NC; Iowa City, IA; and Richmond, VA.

The new postdoctoral fellowship programs are located at: Albany, NY; Albuquerque, NM; Ann Arbor, MI; Baltimore, MD; Bay Pines, FL; Buffalo, NY; Columbia, MO; Detroit, MI; Durham, NC; Greater Los Angeles, CA; Hines, IL; Honolulu, HI; Jackson, MS; Little Rock, AR; Loma Linda, CA; Long Beach, CA; Manhattan NY Harbor, NY; Providence, RI; Salem, VA; Salt Lake City, UT; San Diego, CA; St. Louis, MO; Tampa, FL; Washington, DC; West Haven, CT; and White River Junction, VT.

---

## 2007 Emerging Leaders Development Program (ELDP) Graduates



The ELDP is a core component of Veterans Health Administration’s (VHA’s) succession planning and workforce development initiatives. Our local program graduates completed a rigorous academic program which included attending onsite and off-site workshops with ELDP participants from VA Medical Center, San Francisco, and VA Northern California Health Care System. Our ELDP participants were also required to complete a series of independent learning assignments and service-level customer service project. Each of our ELDP participants was also required to make a formal presentation about their customer service projects. Their shared experiences and knowledge gained during the ELDP will serve our graduates well in their respective leadership paths. Congratulations!

*Congratulations to the graduates of VAPAHCS’ Emerging Leaders Development Program (ELDP) Class of 2007. Graduates, pictured above, are: (Seated, left to right): Tim Verceles, Kristin Collins, Chi Pham, Jackie Bevins (ELDP Program Manager), Melissa Puckett, Megan O’Connor. (Standing, left to right): Juan Selles, Debbra Yamaguchi, George Kennedy, Mary Crandles, Karen Parecki, Kevin Ochs, Tracy Marino, Brenda Barrios, Peggy Allyn, Lisa Freeman (Director).*



# EMPLOYEE NEWS

## Employee Service Awards

### 10 Years

**Patrick Aki**  
Engineering Svc.

**Michael Barry**  
Engineering Svc.

**Bobette Bernardo**  
Nursing LTC

**Kevin Bloxom**  
Anesthesiology Svc.

**Ismael Briseno**  
Nursing LTC

**Harold Craig**  
Chief of Staff

**Carmelita Ermino**  
Nursing LTC

**Gemma Factolerin**  
Nursing LTC

**Derrick Felton**  
Vet Center

**Della Franz**  
Nursing AC

**Emilia Green-Riviere**  
Surgical Svc.

**Kimberly Hudson**  
Environmental Mgmt Svc.

**Milton Johnson**  
Nuclear Medicine

**George Kennedy**  
Psychiatry Svc.

**Gary Peichoto**  
Medical Svc.

**Brian Quinn**  
Anesthesiology Svc.

**Nancy Rapalus**  
Anesthesiology Svc.

**Teresita Rumohr**  
Nursing LTC

**Delia Sampayan**  
Nursing LTC

**Sandra Scaling**  
Psychiatry Svc.

**Parmjit Sidhu**  
Nursing LTC

**Pamela Swales**  
Psychiatry Svc.

**Alamoti Taufa**  
Nursing LTC

### 15 Years

**Alan Babakan**  
A&MMS

**Florence Baluyut**  
Nursing AC

**Irene Bermudez**  
Nursing Rehab.

**Susan Bourgeois**  
Dental Svc.

**Robin Braxton**  
Psychology Svc.

**Susan Cole**  
Blind Rehab Svc.

**Catherine Cook**  
Nursing AC

**Andrew Dadd**  
Blind Rehab Svc.

**Cynthia Dutra-Brice**  
Medical Svc.

**Colleen Formoso**  
Nursing M/S

**Rowena Galang**  
Pathology & Lab Svc.

**Michael Gould**  
Medical Svc.

**Arthur Halliday**  
Extended Care

**Karen Hopkins**  
Nursing Rehab.

**Josefina Karaca**  
Nursing LTC

**April Kepney**  
Chief of Staff

**Lawrence Yu An Lou**  
IRMS

**Carmencita Manaois**  
Nursing LTC

**Andrea McCauley**  
Nursing LTC

**Kristopher Morrow**  
Chief of Staff

**Rosario Pasion**  
Nursing LTC

**Debra Roberts**  
Nursing M/S

**Trevor Rutherford**  
Nutrition & Food Svc.

**Ronnie Sandaydiego**  
Nursing MH

**Ann Struck**  
Chief of Staff

**Nancy Thomas**  
Human Res. Svc.

**Sandra Ann Walkker**  
Nursing LTC

**Florence Wong**  
Nursing AC

**Mary Mai-Ming Yen**  
Nursing M/S

### 20 Years

**Suvarna Akki**  
Medical Svc.

**Joanne Baker**  
Blind Rehab Svc.

**Margaret Baldwin**  
Nursing LTC

**Stephen Burgor**  
Chief of Staff

**Pamela Cannon**  
Nursing M/S

**Kevin Clark**  
Social Work Svc.

**David Dickerson**  
A&MMS

**Thomas Fitzgerald**  
Director's Office

**Gloria Franklin**  
Nursing AC

**Stephanie Franklin**  
IRMS

**Marites Garcia**  
Pharmacy Svc.

**Silverio Gasmen**  
Engineering Svc.

**Carma Heitzmann**  
Psychology Svc.

**Esmeralda Javier**  
Nursing LTC

**Magdalena Kaczynska**  
Medical Svc.

**Yah-Der Lai**  
Nursing AC

**Shee Jung Lee**  
Nutrition & Food Svc.

**William Logan**  
Nutrition & Food Svc.

**Gary Miles**  
Psychology Svc.

**Richard Mills**  
Nursing MH

**Mohammed Omary**  
Medical Svc.

**Seu Pitzer**  
Nursing AC

**Hedva Porat-Martin**  
Psychology Svc.

**Peter Portolos**  
Engineering Svc.

**David Rogers**  
Social Work Svc.

**Nancy Searcy**  
Nursing AC

**Ellen Shibata**  
Chief of Staff

**Marcia Trainito**  
IRMS

**Richard Wall**  
Nursing Rehab.

**Donna Wing**  
Nursing AC

**Evelyn Young**  
Voluntary Svc.

### 25 Years

**Amado Cayabyab**  
Engineering Svc.

**Michel Hyatt**  
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

**Sheila Jun**  
Nursing LTC

**Mancy McDonald**  
Nursing Rehab.

**Kevin McGill**  
Research Svc.

**Brad Myers**  
Engineering Svc.

**Ceferino Perez**  
Human Res. Svc.

**Amelia Reyes**  
Nursing Rehab.

**Priscilla Sarinas**  
Medical Svc.

**Jeanne Schaefer**  
Director's Office

**Carole Stepp**  
Nursing AC

### 30 Years

**Carolyn Evans**  
Spinal Cord Injury

**Gerald King**  
A&MMS

**Sandra Lynch**  
Chief of Staff

**Delfin Ng**  
Engineering Svc.

**Bobette Nicholl**  
Nursing M/S

**Carol Yamane**  
Nursing MS

**Teresa Yoon**  
Recreation Svc.

### 35 Years

**Lloyd Abella**  
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

**Robert Coleman**  
Research & Education

**Eric Jacobson**  
Business Office

**Jared Tinklenberg**  
Psychiatry Svc.

**Thomas Williams**  
Engineering Svc.

### 40 Years

**Audrey Ellis**  
Fiscal Svc.

**Sharon Lindsay**  
Pathology & Lab Svc.

**Thomas Mazurczak**  
Nutrition & Food Svc.

**Anita Straley**  
Nursing AC

## Retirees

**Romeo Bayaua (18)**  
Nursing Svc.

**Hilarion Cantor (28)**  
Fiscal Svc.

**Amanda Din (33)**  
Nutrition & Food Svc.

**Mohsain Essa (17)**  
Psychiatry Svc.

**Castora Feliciano (26)**  
Nursing Svc.

**Jerome Green (12)**  
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

**William Hicok (25)**  
Engineering Svc.

**Laura Higby (37)**  
Medical Svc.

**Mir Hoda (17)**  
Nursing Svc.

**Marion Logan (21)**  
Extended Care

**Joe Marcelo (28)**  
Medical Svc.

**Consolacion Ongyod (19)**  
Nursing Svc.

**Wendy Page (21)**  
Business Office

**Eugene Parish (09)**  
Social Work Svc.

**Kim Park (21)**  
Director's Office

**Scott Peterson (09)**  
Police Svc.

**Frank Phillippe (35)**  
IRMS

**Joan Rawson (27)**  
Nursing Svc.

**Michael Rodriguez (33)**  
A&MMS

**Dolores Rowen (22)**  
Canteen Svc.

**Patrick Ryan (16)**  
Blind Rehab Svc.

**Cathrine Saalfeld (21)**  
Human Res. Svc.

**Esperanza Sanchez (19)**  
Nursing Svc.

**Eugene Schacht (20)**  
Director's Office

**Janis Squire (20)**  
Nursing Svc.

**Joan Stark (23)**  
Nursing Svc.

**J. Dwight Wilson III (32)**  
Nursing Svc.

*Numbers in parentheses  
indicate years of service.*

# You Make a Difference!

*Submitted by staff, our veterans and their families*



Lee, Judith Cunanan, Bella Cryer, Ryan Wheeler and Bernadette Cascasan. They were all very professional and made me feel at ease and comfortable with the procedure. I want to commend the VA for having such a fine and competent staff of doctors and nurses. I always feel I am getting the best treatment and service at your hospital.

— A veteran

Three staff members, Bernadette Mitchell, Perlas Balela and Matthew Giordano, (shown with lead housekeeper Jefferson Cerf) went “above and beyond” their jobs to assist in recovering from a minor emergency at the VA San Jose clinic.



On the morning of February 20, 2008 at 7:30 am, a nurse called my office to report flooding on the floor of four GMC exam rooms and one housekeeping closet in the GMC area. It was found that the night housekeeper accidentally left a water faucet turned on above a drain that was being fixed. Water had spilled over into the hallway and exam rooms. Bernadette, Perlas and Matthew immediately looked for ways to assist in the cleaning up and drying of the flooded areas. Because of their assistance and ingenuity to clean up the flood and to dry and disinfect the affected area all patients and physicians were able to be seen on time at 8:00 am at the clinic opening.

These staff should be recognized for their contribution and assistance to preparing the clinic for patients to be seen in a clean and safe environment.

— Allen Hullinger, Administrative Officer,  
VA San Jose, Monterey and Capitola clinics

My husband served in the 101st Airborne Division. He always told me that if anything happened to take his DD 214s to the nearest VA facility. Needless to say the time came with his stroke and I drove to Palo Alto. Michael Alston, patient services, was extremely helpful and understanding. I became very emotional and he took the time to calm my nerves.



Another medical support assistant, Mr. Phillip (Phoenix) Arivett, noticed my concern and offered words of kindness. He also served in the 101st Airborne. My husband once mentioned that the 101st Airborne National Organization offers a “Double Eagle” pin if a current member recruits a new member. I mentioned this to Mr. Arivett, and he was enthusiastic about helping. A few weeks later, I received the “Double Eagle” pin along with a thank you for recruiting Mr. Arivett. When I read the note and showed the pin to my husband, his eyes filled with tears of joy and pride. We are very fortunate to have people like Mr. Arivett serving our military community.

— A veteran's wife

You are to be commended in the quality of care we are receiving at the VA Palo Alto. I recently received care in the same day clinic and emergency room. Second year resident Dr. Daniel Sedehi was exceptional in the way he treated me. He was informative and courteous in his care. When I left for the day, I felt that he had done everything he could to alleviate my fears and treated my whole person. Dr. Sedehi, thank you for your fine service. Your attention to quality of care is a rare quality. In a difficult time you are a cut above.

— A veteran

I would like to express my appreciation for Dr. Reckord's superior, professional performance at the Modesto Outpatient Clinic. I always have a positive interaction during my visits.

He presents himself in a professional manner. He calls me personally with my lab results and explains them in a way I can understand. He's courteous and has a very good bedside manner. I firmly believe that his pleasant demeanor, civility and professionalism are inherent in him and are a reflection on how he really is.

I am very lucky to have him as my primary care provider and proud as well to be a VA employee who works with providers like him.

— A veteran and employee

**THE**  
**epicenter**

is published by and for  
employees of the VA Palo Alto  
Health Care System.

Submissions should be received by the 1st working day of the month to be included in upcoming issues. Due to space limitations, it is not possible to publish all submissions.

We welcome any comments, suggestions or story ideas you may have; please contact Patricia Teran-Matthews (00P) at 650-849-1222 or via email at [patricia.matthews1@va.gov](mailto:patricia.matthews1@va.gov).

**VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

3801 Miranda Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94304 • Phone (650) 493-5000 • [www.palo-alto.med.va.gov](http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov)